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Book reviews

Spencer-Oatey, Helen and Peter Franklin. 2009. *Intercultural interaction: A multidisciplinary approach to intercultural communication*. New York: Palgrave-Macmillan 2009. Hardback ISBN 978-1-4039-1184-1, £ 65/78 €; Paperback 978-1-4039-1185-8, £ 20/€ 24/USD\$ 103

Reviewed by Karen Grainger, Department of Humanities, Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, S1 1WB, UK, k.p.grainger@shu.ac.uk

This volume is a very welcome addition to the existing body of published text books on intercultural communication. As its title indicates, it aims to bring together research and theory from a number of disciplinary backgrounds, principally psychology, business studies and applied linguistics (including discourse analysis). As the authors suggest, all too often in the intercultural communication literature, discourse analysis and pragmatics are given short shrift. It is their particular aim to give this linguistic perspective, while still respecting the contribution of other fields of study. The book succeeds in being erudite but, by and large, it does not assume specialist knowledge. It is written in an accessible style, with a clear structure, so that it should reach a fairly wide audience of undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as researchers and professional trainers.

In the introduction the authors set out their aims, which include an emphasis on experience (including their own) and an acknowledgment of their own subjectivity in writing the book. It raises some important theoretical and methodological questions, such as “how do we identify cultural behaviour?” (p. 4), suggesting that what is to follow will not be a naive or superficial treatment of the subject. The remainder of the book is divided into four parts: (1) “Conceptualizing Intercultural Interaction”, which is an overview of current and significant theories of intercultural communication, (2) “Promoting Competence in Intercultural Interaction”, which is an applied consideration of the assessment and development of intercultural competence, (3) “Researching Intercultural Interaction”, intended for those wanting to conduct research and (4) an extremely useful “Resources” section.

Chapter 2, “Unpacking culture”, I would consider an essential starting point for anyone about to research or teach intercultural communication. The whole premise of the chapter is that the notion of “culture” cannot be taken for granted. It presents a useful examination of the various ways in which culture is theorized in the disciplines of psychol-

ogy, anthropology, business studies and applied linguistics. The authors refer to the seminal and oft-cited works of Hall and Hofstede but discuss these alongside other perspectives, such as social constructionism and Wenger's (1998) notion of shared repertoires. Rather than attempt a definitive answer to the questions of "what is culture?" and "what is intercultural interaction?", the authors problematize conventional wisdom and put forward alternatives for consideration. The overall organization of the chapter helps to make sense of the issues and is divided into sections on how culture-general (emic) characteristics are treated in the four disciplines, followed by a consideration of culture under the themes of "regularity", "social groups" and "representation". As with most of the rest of the book, the main narrative is interspersed with helpful text-boxes, exemplars and tables that offer comparisons of the various models of culture.

Having established that the notion of culture is not straightforward, Chapter 3 then looks at the intersection of culture and interaction. The chapter is sectioned into 3 main parts, each one reviewing the contribution of a particular disciplinary area; psychology and communication studies, applied linguistics and foreign language education, business and management studies. The authors inevitably draw from a wide range of studies (which are presented accessibly in text boxes and tables) and this in itself is useful. However, their discussion is more than a mere overview; it is also an interesting critique of the field and how it has developed in various disciplines. For example, in discussing the contribution of applied linguistics, they state " ... communicative language teaching, which has been the dominant teaching approach for several decades in many 'Western' countries, has been so influenced by speech act theory and discourse analysis that its links with the cultural sphere have been lost." (p. 64). Thus, the reader is able to assess the contributions as well as the limitations of each of the approaches.

In the following four chapters specific intercultural interaction competencies are addressed in detail: achieving understanding, promoting rapport, confronting disadvantage and domination, and adapting to unfamiliar cultures. Chapter 4 takes a specific example as an illustration of misunderstanding between conversational participants and discusses how "message communication competencies" (p. 81) may be theorized, using concepts from across the disciplines: accommodation, high context and low context communication, contextualization cues and style. In this chapter, non-verbal, as well as verbal communication is discussed. Some readers may find this treatment of body language frustratingly limited but this reflects the interests and the expertise of the authors, which is from a broadly applied linguistics background. Finally,

in this chapter, there is a useful section on the pitfalls of using an interpreter.

Chapter 5 may be the most interesting and relevant for readers of the *Journal of Politeness Research*. It concentrates on “relational” aspects of message construction and bases the discussion around six “rapport management competencies” (p. 102) to which many of the concepts from politeness theory may be applied. To begin with, an experiential example is given of a cross-cultural incident that resulted in bad feeling. The discussion is then brought back to this example at several junctures in the chapter, for illustrative purposes.

Chapter 6 turns to an issue that is often underplayed in the intercultural communication literature; that of differential power relations in interaction. By allocating a full chapter to this issue and naming it “Confronting disadvantage and domination”, the authors foreground some of the more political considerations involved in researching intercultural interaction. They attempt to cover a lot of ground under the four main headings of “impression management”, “stereotypes”, “discrimination” and “English as a World language” and consequently, this chapter only touches on the potentially sensitive issues of racism, prejudice and linguistic imperialism. Some readers may find this treatment somewhat cursory as compared with that found in, say, Holliday et al. (2010). However, the authors may justifiably argue that there is not space for the in-depth discussion of such issues in a book with a readership that is aimed at practitioners as well as academics. Nevertheless, for the interested reader, as with all the chapters, there are some useful “suggestions for further reading” at the end.

The final chapter in part I, covers the topic of adapting to unfamiliar cultures. The material drawn on for this chapter is necessarily psychological in orientation since it explains and reviews the effects of culture shock and assimilation. Perhaps for reasons of space, the discussion is, once again, rather brief and tends to be kept at a rather abstract level. I would have liked to see more detailed discussion of the complexities of integration for different groups of people and, furthermore, I would have thought the authors could have usefully made links between this chapter and the previous one on disadvantage. For example, the plight of the refugee (and the post-traumatic shock that may add to their culture shock) is not addressed, although there is an interesting, if limited, discussion of the UK policy of multiculturalism and whether it aids or hinders immigrant integration into the host community. The final parts of this chapter also touch on the topic of “becoming intercultural” (p. 165) and the phenomenon of cultural hybridity. Here, the work of Kim (2001), and other psychologists, is cited but sadly the

work of sociolinguistics such as Hewitt (1986, 1992), Back (1995) and Rampton (2009) on this very topic, is not mentioned.

Part 2 begins the more applied section of the book. It comprises two chapters on how to “promote competence in intercultural interaction” (p. 171): one on assessing competence and one on building competence. Chapter 8 reviews various assessment instruments that can be used for evaluation (of an organization) and training purposes. Chapter 9 outlines ways of developing intercultural competence in two main areas: business/organizations and schools. This is not a “how to” guide so much as an appraisal of development methods and skills in professional and educational contexts. Ways of approaching needs analysis, training methods and content are all suggested and discussed. However, whether these techniques may apply to the voluntary sector or public sectors that deal with adult refugees and migrant workers (e. g., Refugee Council, Citizen’s Advice Bureaux, local authorities) is not explicitly considered and once again, I was frustrated by the lack of a more sociological/sociolinguistic perspective. For example, in discussing the development of cultural awareness in schools, there is no mention of the fact that while foreign language teaching in Europe may have “cultural awareness” as an aim, there is also often an assumption that pupils only need an awareness of *foreign* cultures, not of the diverse languages and cultures that exist in their own towns and cities. In the conclusion to this chapter the authors make some interesting critical comments on the lack of professional standards in the field and they call for more postgraduate programmes. This is something that readers of the book may already be engaged in, or may be interested in setting up.

Part 3 consists of two chapters on researching intercultural communication. Chapter 10 introduces the range of topics that have been studied. These are discussed in sections that refer back to the main themes of earlier chapters: interaction competence, understanding and rapport, disadvantage and domination, adaptation to unfamiliar cultures, and intercultural interaction competence development. Appropriate methods (DCTs, surveys, interviews, discourse data) are discussed in connection with each of these areas of interest.

Chapter 11 is a thoughtful guide as to how to go about intercultural interaction research. The authors suggest that researchers need to plan whether their study will be comparative or interactional, how the notion of culture will be handled and how the researchers can reduce their own cultural bias. Next, various kinds of data collection are introduced (video/audio data, non-participant observation, self-report data, semi-experimental data), along with a discussion of their various attributes and limitations. There is then a short section on the analysis and

interpretation of data, followed by an even briefer section on ethical issues. The politeness scholar wishing to get into the area of intercultural communication will find this chapter very useful. As with the rest of the book, it is not intended to be a comprehensive guide, but rather a “way in”, that gives links and connections to other more in-depth works that the readers can find for themselves. In fact, the final chapter has just this as its main aim: it consists of a list of books, websites, associations, conferences, DVDs and so on, for further study.

The field of intercultural communication is a diverse field and it is gratifying to find a single volume that competently brings together and discusses how different disciplines approach it. It covers a lot of ground but the book manages not to overwhelm the reader with conflicting accounts by being well-presented and organized. In particular, and importantly for the readers of the *Journal of Politeness Research*, the authors give the weight that is deserved to the contribution of pragmatics and politeness theory. There is nevertheless a slight bias in favour of psychological treatments of matters such as attitudes and identity and a slight neglect of sociolinguistic studies, particularly recent ones. Similarly, the sections on promoting intercultural competence seem to be geared towards the training of “professionals”, rather than “blue collar” workers, or even volunteers. One practical advantage of this book is that it may obviate the need for intercultural communication course designers to have more than one set text. However, although it covers a wide range of issues, methodologies and theories, I would expect that students and researchers would need to follow up many of the useful references for further consultation. Despite my misgivings about the lack of consideration given to intercultural communication in immigrant and multicultural populations on the domestic scene, I would recommend to any readers thinking of researching or teaching intercultural communication, that they consider adopting this book as a set text.

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Reviewed by Yun He, Department of English and Drama, Loughborough University, Loughborough, Leics. UK, Y.He3melody@gmail.com

The Chinese are often perceived by many Westerners and native Chinese alike to have been courteous in the past but to be somewhat less polite or rather uncivilized nowadays. Some previous studies (e. g., Young 1994) have touched upon this issue, but without exception, they focus solely on either the traditional or the contemporary aspect. The knotty yet interesting object of instigation thus remains essentially unexplored. *Politeness in Historical and Contemporary Chinese*, purposely designed to address the transformation of Chinese im/politeness during the past few centuries, is a most timely and welcome book for those of us engrossed in “the chameleon-like nature of politeness” (Watts 2003: 24).

Built on the authors’ continuing theoretical and empirical explorations of Chinese politeness (e. g., Pan 1995; Kádár and Pan 2011), this volume characterizes Chinese politeness norms and practices using a comparative diachronic approach. It thus in a large sense offers a perspective on Chinese politeness that is complementary to Gu’s (1990) conversational-maxim view and Pan’s (2000) situation-based approach.

This long-awaited book is “anchored to the so-called discursive approaches to linguistic politeness” (p. 13). Allowing for data complexity and multiplicity of interpretations, this approach enables the authors to comfortably explore the normative, ambivalent and discursive nature of Chinese politeness. In line with the discursive approaches to politeness, this book is based on an impressive corpus. The two comparable datasets, in both Mandarin and Cantonese collected in North and South China, cover periods of time spanning as long as four centuries. The data are highly varied in genres and types, including letters, novels, textbooks, newspapers, to name just a few. Hence a wide variety of practices of Chinese politeness are represented. Most notably, perhaps,

the five hundred hours of taped naturally occurring conversations is unlikely to be equalled in current politeness literature. Moreover, the contemporary data were gathered through a range of methods such as tape recording, participant observation, survey interviews, and focus groups. With such rich data the authors are able to triangulate their interpretations and findings even within the context of a fairly compact volume.

As one of the valuable characteristics of this book, as many as five appendices and two indexes are provided after the text. Among them, Chronological List of Chinese Dynasties, Simplified Chinese Transcript of the Texts Studied and Index of Chinese Expressions Studied should be particularly helpful for those unfamiliar with Chinese language and history. The carefully thought-out structure is another striking feature. Briefly, the volume starts by taking issue with the myth of Chinese politeness. The remainder of this book then centres on deconstructing this myth and reconstructing the process of changes in Chinese politeness by examining politeness in historical and contemporary China. The authors also analyze politeness in the modern or transitional period in order to map the disintegration of historical formal politeness and its underlying logic. More precisely, the text consists of six chapters as outlined below.

Chapter 1 provides the background and objectives of the book. To pinpoint the “mysterious loss of [Chinese] tradition” and the large gap between “old” and “new” politeness systems, this co-authored volume has two main areas of focus (p. 2):

- (a) to compare historical (from 18th to early 20th centuries) and contemporary (1950 to present) Chinese norms of polite communication
- (b) to uncover the driving force behind the transformation of politeness during modern times

This book is written for researchers and students interested in Chinese politeness and many neighbouring disciplines such as communication studies, sociolinguistics, etc. Given the rapid rise of China on the world stage, this volume is also targeted at general readers.

Chapter 2 begins with a challenge to the circulating misconceptions or myth of Chinese politeness. It then outlines the framework used in this volume and delineates the aspects of politeness examined. Chinese politeness has changed considerably, particularly in formality during the past centuries partly as a result of historical events. Pan and Kádár argue that stereotyping historical China as “courteous” and contemporary China as somewhat “impolite” is over-simplistic in the light of

social and discursive factors (pp. 12–13). The authors therefore propose to deconstruct Chinese politeness and reconstruct its changing process by comparing “the *formal(ized)* or *conventional(ized)* [original italics] aspects of politeness norms in historical and contemporary China” (p. 21). Within an integrated pragmaphilological-sociopragmatic approach, their guiding notion is that politeness is a reflection of linguistic rules, cultural norms and social practices.

Chapter 3 demonstrates that historical Chinese politeness was predominantly expressed by “a large lexicon of honorifics and various discursive strategies” (p. 43). Terms of address were the most frequently used honorifics. The authors argue that acknowledging the addressee’s social status or role through deferential language use was the “motor of politeness” (p. 40) in historical China. According to them, historical Chinese politeness was ritual and deferential. Like politeness in Japan and many other historical societies, historical Chinese politeness had an important ‘non-strategic’ or discernment aspect. Consequently as conventionalized acts, discursive strategies (e. g., refusals and requests) of historical Chinese politeness mostly convey self-denigration and addressee-elevation and regularly “co-occur with honorific forms” (p. 52).

Although historical Chinese politeness was predominantly conventionalized, formal tools of politeness could also be used to express emergent politeness or non-polite meanings such as negative emotions. At the same time, deference or politeness sometimes could be conveyed by unconventional means such as banter (p. 58). Moreover, the authors argue that since late imperial China was by nature a hierarchical society, historical politeness was unequally distributed between the social groups of the “powerful”, the “powerless” and women (p. 61). Compared with other social groups, those with more power had a larger repertoire of self-denigrating terminologies at their disposal and “were entitled to be addressed by similarly elaborate terms of address” (p. 62). Women’s status was determined by their husbands or families. Hence they were addressed accordingly while they referred to themselves with very few denigrating terms. Interestingly, contrary to the stereotypical view on historical politeness, many encounters containing rudeness are identified in the vernacular data and politeness strategies were often ignored between intimates such as family members (p. 67).

Chapter 4 is the central part of this book as it not only surveys politeness norms and practices in contemporary Chinese but also compares them with those in historical China. We are told that, due largely to the impact of political events, contemporary Chinese politeness practices have shifted from the traditional over-reliance on honorific lexicon to discursive moves and discursive strategies. Although new terms and expressions were introduced to meet new sociopragmatic requirements,

the number of address terms in contemporary China is much smaller than those in the historical period (p. 85). Ritualized and denigrating/elevating honorifics used most frequently in historical China have nearly disappeared. Instead, many discursive strategies are used, among which particles, turn-taking, small talk and mocking or teasing occur most frequently (p. 90).

At the discourse level in contemporary Chinese, speech acts such as refusals, apologies and requests are often performed using various discursive strategies such as indirectness and taking redressive action. A speech act delivered in a traditional ritualized form would very often be perceived as inappropriate or insincere (p. 101). The authors' analysis of the discursive strategies used in contemporary written texts is especially novel and interesting. The authors demonstrate that in Chinese newspapers contextual, textual and presentational cues such as the font, size and colour of the news all play an important role in contemporary politeness practices.

The discrepancy between the heavy use of honorifics and deferential lexicon in historical China and the increasing importance of discursive strategies and contextual cues in contemporary China accounts effectively for the myth of Chinese politeness. In spite of China's ideological campaign to promote the use of equalitarian terms, the cultural norms of hierarchy and the value of in-groupness remain "intact" (p. 108). A case in point is that, as in the past, the resources of polite expressions are asymmetrically distributed among the "powerful" and the "powerless". The lack of formalized politeness in contemporary China may be perceived as impolite. However, the authors argue – probably drawing insights from Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice – that "the 'anomaly' may become the norm and the norm may become the anomaly" (p. 112). Hence Chinese politeness practice is dynamic, fluid and in constant flux.

Chapter 5 attempts to get to grips with the "miraculous" collapse of the historical politeness system. A comparison between politeness in Mainland China, Singapore, Taiwan and North Korea shows that no easy links can be established between the loss of historical honorifics and historical/political events and ideologies. Nor does "transitional" data provide sufficient evidence for the shift from historical to contemporary politeness. The authors argue that the key lies largely in the language itself: "historical Chinese was inherently vulnerable to social changes" (p. 128). As a representing medium of Confucian class ideologies it was vulnerable to large-scale changes in modern (transitional) times when hierarchy was being strongly criticized. In languages such as Korean and Japanese, honorifics are built into the grammar but Chinese honorifics are not. The historical Chinese politeness system, there-

fore, collapsed for two interdependent reasons: it rested on Confucian hierarchical ideologies and it was ungrammaticalized (p. 152).

Finally, Chapter 6, “Deconstructing Chinese Politeness”, shows three sets of linguistic tools that the authors identified in their data analysis which are used to express Chinese politeness: “honorifics and deference lexicons, discursive strategies, and lack of polite expressions” (p. 155). The linguistic tools employed are similar in historical and contemporary Chinese politeness, but the scope and domain range for their usage have changed. Despite these differences, Pan and Kádár maintain that historical and contemporary Chinese politeness functions as one rather than two totally different systems. They argue this is because politeness interacts with linguistic rules, cultural norms and social practices. In China, it is the cultural norms that hold them together. The whole text concludes by highlighting that the misperceptions or misrepresentations of Chinese politeness were “largely due to the mismatch between the unchanged cultural norms and the changed linguistic expressions of politeness caused by changing social practices.” (p. 161).

In summary, *Politeness in Historical and Contemporary Chinese* tackles a seemingly unanswerable question. This book exemplifies the strength of the use of combined methodological approaches in investigating politeness in general and the development or evolution of politeness in particular. Written in a lively, engaging, and reader-friendly style, this book will appeal to both academics and ordinary readers.

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